

Senate Critical Of CIA Head for Globe Letter

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WASHINGTON. — A letter to the St. Louis Globe-Democrat by

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Richard Helms caused strong criticism of the Central Intelligence Agency Director in the Senate Thursday.

The senators said the head of an executive branch agency should not endorse an editorial which dealt unfavorably with a member of the Senate.

Soon after the floor discussion, the Senate was told that Mr. Helms was "sorry" for his "mistake" in writing the letter to the newspaper and that it was the only such letter he had sent.

In the furore over the letter, some senators also criticized The Globe-Democrat for the contents of an editorial which precipitated the episode.

PRAISED SENATE

The editorial, titled "Brickbats for Fulbright" and published on July 18, commended the Senate for rejecting an effort led by Senator William Fulbright (Dem.), Arkansas, and others, to establish a special new committee to supervise the CIA.

The editorial referred to Sen. Fulbright, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as "crafty" and said he "has been given him comeuppance by the senate."

The editorial also praised the CIA as "one of our most valuable agencies" and said the Senate vote was "a sound vote of confidence" in the agency.

HELMS' LETTER

On July 27, The Globe-Democrat printed in its letters column a letter from Mr. Helms saying: "I want to let you know my pleasure in reading the editorial 'Brickbats for Fulbright' . . ."

The letter went on to say the editorial "reflects so well your paper's policy of 'printing the news impartially, supporting what it believes to be right and opposing what it believes to be wrong without regard to party politics'."

torial were read to the Senate by Senator Eugene McCarthy (Dem.), Minnesota, an ally of Senator Fulbright in the unsuccessful effort to place a new committee over the CIA.

First, Senator McCarthy said he supposed the editorial was "within the limits of irresponsibility which must be allowed on editorial pages."

CALLED OUT OF PLACE

Then he moved on to his main point, which was, as he said, that "it was entirely out of place

for Mr. Helms to sign a letter charging Mr. Fulbright with being 'crafty' or attempting to advise the Senate on 'what we should take up or should not take up.'"

Senator McCarthy charged that through the letter the CIA was "involving itself in domestic politics" for the first time.

If Mr. Helms is not "challenged," the Senator said, candidates in future elections may be flourishing letters from the CIA attacking their opponents.

He said Mr. Helms owed an apology to the Senate and should furnish "assurance" that this "policy" of letter-writing will be discontinued.

Eight other Senators took generally similar positions, with varying degrees of intensity in their criticisms of Mr. Helms, a career intelligence professional who moved up to the CIA top command only a few weeks ago.

Several Senators indicated they were particularly bothered by Mr. Helms' praise of an editorial referring to a colleague as "crafty." Some said the recent CIA committee debate had been conducted without indulging in personalities.

MADE AN ERROR

Among those criticizing Mr. Helms were Senators who have consistently defended the CIA from assaults by Sens. Fulbright, McCarthy, and other senators.

They said in substance, that Mr. Helms had made an error which he is not likely to repeat.

One of these CIA supporters, Senator Leverett Saltonstall (Rep.), Massachusetts, called the letter "a very questionable thing" and said he did not know why it was written.

HAS STATEMENT

Later he returned to the Senate floor to announce he had talked to Mr. Helms by telephone and was authorized to state Mr. Helms' comments.

"Mr. Helms assures me that it is the only letter he has written, that it was a mistake, and he feels sorry about it."

"He did sign the letter. I think there were a great many letters he had signed at the same time, but he makes no excuse."

Senator Fulbright expressed appreciation for the remarks of the other Senators.

FULBRIGHT STAND

"My own feelings are not particularly injured by the editorial," he said.

"This particular newspaper has been printing similar editorials for a number of years. There is nothing new or different or unique about the editorials."

Senator Fulbright said he'd like to know whether the CIA director "writes to all" who condemn him.

"I was shocked that a director should go out of his way to write a letter to an editor of a rather radical newspaper," the Senator said.

"It certainly takes a radical position on foreign policy and is most unrestrained in its criticisms of anyone who disagrees with its position, as it was in this editorial."

Senator Fulbright also said it is "curious" that Mr. Helms endorsed The Globe-Democrat's editorial credo, which is printed daily on the editorial page.

"I hope that Mr. Helms is not under the impression that it is a Democratic newspaper because the word Democrat appears in its title," he said.

"It is anything but a Democratic newspaper, and it never has been."

After the main discussion, Senator Stuart Symington (Dem.), Missouri, who had not been present, came to the Senate floor and said he learned of the letter "with very deep regret."

"I have not always agreed with Senator Fulbright but know him as a man of high character, an able and patriotic American, and I am proud to have his friendship, as he has mine," Sen. Symington said.

"This is a most unfortunate occurrence and one for which I hope there is some explanation."

No one defended Mr. Helms for writing the letter.

The others criticizing him were Senators Mike Mansfield of Montana, the Democratic leader; John Stennis (Dem.), Mississippi, Frank E. Moss (Dem.), Utah, Sam J. Ervin (Dem.), North Carolina, A. S. Mike Monroney (Dem.), Oklahoma, and Milton R. Young (Rep.), North Dakota.